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Sugar Bowl Fans

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It is fascinating to be in the middle of a sporting event and to be surrounded by thousands of people who are rabidly involved, and to be in a position in which you are essentially indifferent to the outcome. The most startling thing about this experience is the realization that human beings could get worked into a frenzy by something of such little significance, while knowing that you yourself would be in the same state if it was your favorite team that was involved. In some ways it is a sobering experience.

This was the case last weekend when I was in New Orleans at the Sugar Bowl, having basically no real interest in the teams and only a marginal interest in the game. I have of course had occasion to see that species called "The Gator Fan" in action and it is never a pretty sight. But to be thrust into the middle of a sea of Gator fans, to have them surrounding you while trapped on an airplane, is truly a harrowing experience.

These people are loud, obnoxious, and generally irritating which doesn't set them apart from any other fans. What sets the Gators apart is their arrogance and the terrible color scheme. The orange, mixed with the white and blue, is particularly offensive to the eye, and creates nausea when consumed in large doses.

Gator fans are an interesting mix of college students, who one expects will be loud and obnoxious, especially when drunk; successful business types; and a scattered assortment of rednecks and crackers. If this latter group are alums then the accreditation of the university is in jeopardy.

One of the truly enlightening moments of the weekend was to listen to Gator fans discuss the redneck characteristics of people from West Virginia. The urban sophistication available on tap in Gainesville, Palatka, and Paine's Prairie clearly must be in excess of the marginal cultural amenities of Morgantown. The precision with which a Gator could describe a redneck from West Virginia indicated more than a passing acquaintance with these forms of life found in the cultural low-ground.

As to the West Virginia Mountaineers, the most surprising thing was that there were more of them in New Orleans than the total population of the State of West Virginia. My guess is that you could have backed up a truck anywhere in West Virginia last

weekend, loaded it up with whatever you might want from any home or store, and no one would have seen you doing this, even in broad daylight.

And of course if accents are an indication of "hickness" then the folks from West Virginia are the biggest of them all. The sounds coming out of people's mouths were truly amazing, and indicated little if any relationship to the English language. There were times when caught in an elevator with group of Mountaineers that I thought I was in a foreign country.

At the game itself West Virginia fans were incredibly loud, in fact as loud as the Gators were obnoxious. At least initially. When West Virginia scored first I thought that the woman behind me had sat on a sharp pointed object. I was desperate to find those ear protectors that airline ground personnel use. But after five minutes of the second quarter these problems were about over, and by the end of third quarter most of the West Virginia people had headed to Bourbon Street, or some other place of mourning, to lick their considerable wounds. What had been a highly visible and loud crowd over the previous three days had been reduced to nearly zero on the Richter Scale.

The loss of visibility and volume among the Mountaineer supporters, was more than compensated for by those wearing the putrid Orange and Blue. The shouting of obscenities, the screaming, and the endless "Go Gators" more than picked up the slack.

It is difficult to comprehend what all of this was about. Here was arguably the third best team in the State of Florida beating up unmercilessly on a highly overrated West Virginia team. In an amazing show of sportsmanship the Gators kicked two field goals and ran a trick play while holding a 28 and then 31 point lead late in the game. While the fans performed orgasmic gyrations worthy of the second coming of Bear Bryant. About the only thing they didn't do was to begin to chant we're number one.

That was left to those from Tallahassee, who barely escaped from the Orange Bowl with their shirts on. Having performed in a manner worthy of the 100th best team in America, they would proudly proclaim that they were Number One. If anyone is Number One, and there is little indication that anyone really is, it would be Auburn. Proving of course that crime pays.